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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KPAO](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: OPPOSITION NEWSPAPER EDITOR-IN-CHIEF SENTENCED TO
TWO YEARS IN PRISON

REF: CAIRO 2825

Classified By: Minister-Counselor for Economic and Political Affairs
William R. Stewart, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) On September 24, the editor-in-chief, his deputy, and a journalist from the "Al Wafd" newspaper (the mouthpiece of Al Wafd, Egypt's oldest liberal political party), were sentenced to two years in prison by the Al Warak Court of Misdemeanors, for "having published untrue information which damaged the reputation of the justice system and the justice ministry." In late January 2007, "Al Wafd" reported on negative comments made about the Egyptian judiciary by Minister of Justice Mamdouh Marei during a parliamentary hearing. Marei was quoted as stating that "90 percent of (Egyptian) judges do not meet the required standards." (Note: Marei is notorious for his battles with the Egyptian judiciary, which have been ongoing throughout his year-long tenure. End note). Al Wafd, along with other opposition and independent newspapers, published that statement, as well as the Minister's subsequent denial of the comment. In late January, eleven lawyers who allegedly are affiliated with the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) filed a lawsuit against the "Al Wafd" journalists, the result of which is the September 24 ruling. The three defendants remain free on bail of approximately \$1000 each, pending their planned appeal.

¶2. (C) Anwar al-Hawari, the sentenced "Al Wafd" editor-in-chief, told reporters after the hearing that, "We did not reveal military secrets. We only did our job as professional journalists The state has launched an offensive against press freedom." Mounir Fakhry Abdel Nour, secretary-general of the Al Wafd party, told poloff that,

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"this is more than a mistake on the part of the government, it is a stupid blunder." He said that Wafd members feel "optimistic" that the case will be resolved positively, "in due course." Ossama Heikal, a deputy editor of "Al Wafd" told us, "This is the latest fashion -- take the journalists to prison. 'Al Wafd' published what the minister said. Then the minister sent a response, which we also published. There was really no basis on which to file the lawsuit." While some press contacts are confident that the ruling will be overturned on appeal, others are not so sure. One journalist noted that, as it is illegal to tape record parliamentary hearings, the "Al Wafd" newsmen do not have a recording of the justice minister's comments, so "they are in a difficult position."

¶3. (C) Comment: The September 24 ruling is a worrisome development, particularly coming on the heels of the September 13 decision by a separate court to sentence four editors-in-chief of various independent newspapers to one

year of hard labor for allegedly defaming President Mubarak (reftel). Those four editors, like the "Al Wafd" journalists, are currently free on bail, and are appealing the court's decision. The next installment in what many Cairo observers have now characterized as a campaign against independent and opposition journalists will come on October 1, which is the first court date in the case of independent "Al Dustour" editor Ibrahim Eissa (one of the four editors sentenced on September 13), who is separately being investigated by the State Security prosecution for allegedly spreading rumors about President Mubarak's health. The Embassy has sent, via e-mail to NEA/ELA and NEA/PPD, suggested press guidance regarding the ruling against the "Al Wafd" journalists.

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